

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, October 14, 2020

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Commissioners

Hector Elizalde
Tess Banko
Joe Leal
Brittanie Moore
Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Ruel Fuentecilla
Tom Lasser
Michael McDowell

Thomas O'Shaughnessy

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Hector Elizalde called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla, 4th District.

Roll Call

There was a total of eight Commissioners at the meeting; quorum present.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Tom Lasser to accept the Minutes for September 9, 2020 and seconded by Commissioner Michael McDowell. With no objections, motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Chair Hector Elizalde gave a brief report on homelessness and the recent fire situation at the San Gabriel River. He stated that there was an argument between two homeless people, one lit a match and started a fire that lasted over 30 days; this was confirmed by the Azusa Police Department after the individual turned himself in. Chair Elizalde had an opportunity to

visit Mountain Cove located in Azusa, California. There are 500 homes and residents living there which is a major concern to the cities of Azusa, Duarte, and Irwindale. The Congressional Office has received over 500 letters from residents who express their concern and have asked for remedies towards this issue. Approximately, 60 homeless people needed to be moved and it was a challenge to get them housed. The program Project Room Key was at maximum capacity but were able to accommodate some of them and the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority (LAHSA) was exhausted. We must stay on top of this issue because it may affect our veteran community. The damage caused by the fire has totaled to 12 billion dollars.

Last month, the Veteran's Advisory Commission requested to receive county emails and it has been approved. If any Commissioner is interested in receiving a county email, please advise Jose Garcia who will be reaching out soon.

Building and Tenant Update

Chair Hector Elizalde read the following report provided by JeNai Davis, Facility Manager on Bob Hope Patriotic Hall:

For the month of September, Bob Hope Patriotic Hall (Hall) remains closed due to COVID-19 protocols.

- Safe Parking – MVA continues to have conference call meetings every other Monday on the status of the Safe Parking program at the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall (Hall). The last call took place on Monday, October 5th where MVA was informed there are currently 2 participants in the program and 1 that is pending the completion of their intake form. Volunteers of America (the organization that is providing the service) is still conducting more outreach to try and secure more participants. The next meeting will take place on Monday, October 19th.
- The Hall will be used as a voting location for the upcoming General Elections for the last 5 days of available voting access of October 30th – November 3rd. Members of MVA staff will be working as Disaster Service Workers (DSWs) at the Hall during these days.
- The Hall was used as location site for an upcoming video of WW II veterans in recognition of the 75th anniversary of WW II. Several veterans were interviewed on camera at the Hall on Wednesday, September 30th while a few others were interviewed offsite. Brigadier General Wong will provide the history of this significant period in military history on October 26th and Al Naipo of the Board of Supervisors office has agreed to provide his services as narrator.
- The VA contacted MVA recently for an upcoming concept to use the parking lot at the Hall as a command post on November 10th for a Stand Out. Plans are still being developed – more information to follow.
- Orders will be placed soon for necessary items in respect of the needs to retrofit the Hall post COVID-19.
- Graffiti removal and prevention plans are currently taking place to remove and deter any further graffiti tagging from the building. It's most recent and noticeable graffiti markings is on the Northwest corner of top of the building. ISD has been notified and provided estimates in support of these efforts. Department is working on preventative measures.
- Mold removal is now complete and the final repair plans will begin for the ceiling prior to entering the Purple Heart Inn dining room.
- Mold has been determined in the flooring of the 4th floor breakroom. Vendors are currently providing estimates to remove the mold. New flooring estimates will then begin to assess the cost to put in new wood flooring to match the flooring in the breakroom on the 8th floor.
- A service request has been sent to ISD to repair the elevator smoke curtain. Currently waiting on the repair to take place.
- There is mold in the basement behind the mural on the West wall. Determinations are pending on whether to retire the mural, store it, etc. to remediate the mold and fix the leak.
- The carpet in the auditorium needs replacing.
- The projector screen fell and was damaged last year. It needs replacing.
- 2 security cameras are currently down.

Ad Hoc Committee Appointed

Vice Chair Tess Banko reported that she met with Jodi Galvin and Stephanie Stone for a preliminary overview on the three different types of courts and how veterans and families are affected. The primary concern is DCFS, however, the issues for veterans and families involved in the court system are of a wider range. Currently, we are looking at all white papers, evidence, and recommendations from a global perspective to see what the challenges are. Jodi Galvin sent over some recommendations that were already pre-drawn up. Director Ruth Wong confirmed that there is some sort of identifier; it is not clear how it's structured or if it is useful for the challenges we are facing now. Commissioner Banko is

conducting a thorough examination in order to understand what already exists; the legal system, the broad overview, VA tracking justice involved veterans, the courts on tracking veterans, and if there is anything else in the county.

Strategic Plan Updates Goal 1

Objective 1– Collaborate with the MVA to create awareness about VAC and the services provided from the MVA

Commissioner Tom Lasser apologized for the misunderstanding and not being prepared with the information. However, he reported that the Bylaws draft was reviewed and updated but still needs to be voted on. Director Ruth Wong stated that County Counsel is reviewing the Ordinance and recommends changes be included in the Bylaws for next month. Commissioner Lasser agreed and stated that he will need help with finalizing the Bylaws.

Commissioner Fuentecilla inquired about the Strategic Plan which was approved and passed through a motion and was wondering if it may have been overlooked. Commissioner Lasser clarified that although the Strategic Plan was approved, the commission is now going to explain how to execute the plan; both Commissioners have five items in which an action plan needs to be discussed on how the Commission will implement the activities.

Chair Hector Elizalde addressed the Commission to further explain that the Strategic Plain will be discussed during the meeting in order to determine an action plan.

Objective 2– Establish Subcommittee to advise MVA on Tenant Agreements in Patriotic Hall

Commissioner Thomas O'Shaughnessy was not able to provide an update as he was not present at the meeting.

Public Comments

None.

Guest Speakers

Jodi Galvin, Executive Director of the Community Veterans Justice Project (CVJP) was introduced by Commissioner Tess Banko to share about the mission of CVJP. Jodi is an attorney with over 30 years of experience in the criminal justice system and there are approximately 1500 justice involved veterans in LA County at any given time. There are five small Veteran Treatment Courtrooms in LA County that only help veterans with honorable discharges, only take felony cases, and two prosecutors who must approve before a vote; they are very restrictive and only help about 100 out of the 1500. The CVJP is connecting with the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN), funded with 30 million dollars to allow veteran peers all over LA County. About a year ago, LA County created a major working group called Alternative to Incarceration (ATI); the group consisted of most county departments and many experts who wrote a massive report with many recommendations. In March, they passed a motion to the Board of Supervisors. Recently, they hired a judge to oversee this project. Unfortunately, ATI did not include MVA, VPAN, CVJP, or the VA (not one entity for veterans).

CVJP is spearheading a proposal to rectify all those organizations to ensure that the veteran community will be included in that because there are specific things to help veterans for alternative sentencing and diversion. The Sherriff's Department has a program called Mental Health Evaluation team designed for veterans. Jodi is learning about a new penal code section 849(b)(1) and (b)(5) that they are using and wants to add it to their toolkit. This section creates a true diversion for veterans with mental health issues by allowing them to go into treatment upon being detained, rather than being arrested and taken into the criminal justice system. The idea is that CVJP and VPAN assist with the case management. Under penal code section 849(b)(1), veterans do a program that lasts for about 90 days and (b)(5) is where veterans do significant Mental Health intervention. By working together to create an infrastructure, with the Sherriff's Department and all Law Enforcement entities to identify military, reservist, national guard, and all veterans; the goal would be to ask if served in the military at the point of arrest. If so, give them a referral to CVJP and VPAN so that an intervention can take place by ensuring veterans get alternative sentencing, diversion, and all services they need to thrive. Very excited to get started and hope to come back to the commission in hopes to get a Letter of Support.

Jodi stated that General Ruth Wong, Director of Military and Veterans Affairs, inquired if this could be used for dependency. Unfortunately, it cannot because with criminals these statutes have very clear requirements, such as verify military service, verify mental health condition as a result of military service instead of a treatment plan. With dependency, DCFS gets involved and there are no statutes that dictate what they need to do. There are no entities available to advise people on what to do when they have an open DCFS case; they do not get an attorney appointed and it could take 3-6 months until a warrant is issued to physically take their children away and a court date is set. That is the major gap with dependency. Jodi created many recommendations for dependency and various ways that this population can be identified in the court system; information has been shared with Commissioner Banko. Commissioner Banko thanked Jodi for her time, support, and patience.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

Motion to support the Battleship Iowa National Museum of the Surface Navy Act – motion approved at Board Meeting on October 13, 2020 to support federal legislation.

Effective January 2021 – DMVA will accept disability certificates issued by a County VSO to enable disabled veterans to obtain license plates or placards formally done through VA system. CALVET came to the rescue and Governor Newsom assigned this new law that will take effect in January.

Veterans Day – working with 3rd and 5th District on a Board Presentation – no veterans of the year event due to COVID-19 restricting the public to attend Board Meetings, instead there will be a video of veterans telling the story of the 75th Anniversary of the Ending of WW II which will represent all branches of service and all cultures.

County Counsel Opinion relating to Ordinance Changes – DMVA will be making changes in County Ordinance recommended by Commissioner Lasser to remove the language that states people sitting on this commission must be Vietnam and/or Combat veterans and prepare Board Letter that will go on consent calendar. County Counsel advised that changes be made in the Bylaws.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- The next Regular Meeting will be held on December 9, 2020. In observance of Veterans Day Holiday, there will be no meeting in November.

Good of the Order

Commissioner Tom Lasser stated that he will be the emcee for a virtual veteran appreciation event hosted by Congressman Ted Lieu for the California's 33rd District in LA County on November 8, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

Vice Chair Tess Banko stated that the West LA VA campus is having a few Drive-thru Food Pantries this holiday season. The first one is a Halloween theme on October 31, 2020 from 8-11am at the Patriot House. The second one will be held on November 21, 2020 from 8:30-11am distributing Thanksgiving meals. The last one will be on December 19, 2020 and will partner with Holiday Lane to serve veterans and families with gifts. On September 29, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion for the Department of Mental Health, Public Health, and Medical Examiner to create and share information with the VA to track veteran suicide in Los Angeles County. A veteran suicide review team will soon bring in partners to understand deaths and gather information in order to track and work towards prevention and engagement. The Department of Human Resources is looking to organize employment opportunities for veterans who are facing financial hardships due to job loss as a result of the pandemic.

Commissioner Joe Leal stated that Project Room Key is now being purchased for long term care due to low funding. Outreach programs are educating the homeless community about local voting sites and are encouraging them to vote. President Donald Trump is planning to bring troops home at the end of the year for the holidays. Service members returning home are going to need time to adjust to civilian life during COVID-19. The veteran suicide rate increases during the holidays due to loneliness.

Commissioners Brittanie Moore and Michael McDowell had nothing to report at this time and thanked everyone for what they do.

Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley experienced technical difficulties, however, she submitted a written report stating the following:

She was privileged to receive items such as t-shirts, hats, glasses, cups, new office chairs, toaster oven, and personal items that she delivered for veterans to Voluntary Services. She met with Alexia Lunningham, Chief of Voluntary Services and took a tour of the newly created clothing rooms for men and women. A privacy room has been created in the Women's area. She highly recommends visiting those areas at the VA. The US Iowa is currently being looked at as a place for veterans to visit for services and appears to be well past the planning stage. She attended the Women's Group USC Collaborative and it was very informative. Martha Varela, Women Veteran Outreach Coordinator, was one of the speakers and provided an update on key women veteran issues. Janet Turner from Congressman Ted Lieu's office provided remarks and plans to provide an update on Vanessa Guillen efforts at the next meeting. Robert Alvarez, Board Deputy from the 5th District, gave a presentation on the Suicide Task Force.

Commissioner Ruel Fuentecilla stated that he attended the Board Meeting held yesterday where there was a motion introduced to support the US Iowa in renaming the Battleship to become a national museum of the surface Navy in which many supporters online that gave public comments; motion passed to send the proposal to Washington DC to have it reviewed and proof read. He submitted a draft document of Commissioner's Activities Monthly Report for review and consideration to vote on at the next meeting.

Commissioner Hector Elizalde stated that the Commissioner's Activities Monthly Report form created by Commissioner Fuentecilla will be sent out to all Commissioners for their review. If there is a consensus of approval at the next regular meeting, then it will be implemented to be used on a monthly basis to have a record of activity. On November 10, 2020 there will be a joint presentation with Congresswoman Grace Napolitano with the quarterly Mental Health Consortium that will focus on veteran issues. There will be two presenters: Richard Bean, Director of Public Affairs, VA Long Beach and General Ruth A. Wong, Director of Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, LA County. He invited everyone to participate. This Consortium consists of 60-75 community organizations that offer services to veterans and families. A flyer with information will be coming soon.

Adjournment

In memory of Jason Khai Phan, US Air Force Senior Airman and Vincent Okamoto, US Army Veteran, it is appropriate that we continue to keep them in our prayers and the memory of all the people who have passed away of COVID-19. Studies show that we have lost thousands and will be very thankful if we survive it. Meeting adjourned in their memory.

A total of 22 participants in attendance. Meeting adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Secretary
October 14, 2020